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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to identify the counseling needs of the adult student enrolled in vocational-technical schools, and specifically to identify the vocational, financial, educational, personal, and social concerns reported by students. A paper-and-pencil questionnaire was administered to a total of 1,817 subjects--1,514 full- or part-time students attending one of three area vocational-technical schools in Wisconsin during 1975-76, and 303 from the same three communities who were considering returning to school but were not enrolled at the time of the study. The particular schools were selected to insure representative sampling across size of institution, rural vs. urban setting, and area of the State. Results showed that sex, age, and full-time/part-time status all appear to be related to the type of concerns reported by students attending postsecondary vocational schools and that academic and vocational concerns appear to be predominant among students and nonstudents. Implications resulting from the findings were (1) the need for trial learning experiences (possibly minilabs) wherein the adult has an opportunity to perform the "typical" student behavior in a relatively low-risk supportive environment, (2) the need to provide vocational information in a manner more geared to adults rather than adolescents, and (3) the need to recognize and attend to the unique needs of full-time and part-time, male and female students of varying ages. (SH)

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COUNSELING NEEDS OF ADULT STUDENTS

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COUNSELING NEEDS OF ADULT STUDENTS

Adults are attending institutions of higher learning in record numbers. Except for the post-World War II influx of veterans into colleges and universities, at no time in history have so many adults come under the influence of formal educational agencies. A number of factors have converged to produce this burgeoning adult enrollment--job obsolescence and the subsequent need for retraining, increased numbers of women wishing to enter or re-enter the job market, and the increased availability of leisure time. There may also be large numbers of adults who would like to attend post-secondary institutions but are deterred at various points of the decision-making process (13). Higher education planners speculate that recruiting these adult students will be necessary to offset the decline in the proportion of traditionally college-aged youth in the population.

Despite recruitment plans, however, and the inevitability of an older student population, little is known about the educational, vocational, social, or personal needs of the adult student. A search of ERIC documents and current journals, undertaken prior to this study, yielded about 300 articles, books, and monographs related to the adult learner. Of these, under twenty, however, were considered helpful in understanding the adult learner's higher education needs or identifying programs structured to meet those needs.

The needs of adults returning to school have been addressed by Boyd and Griffith (1); Dooley and White (3); Hartwig (5), Division of Continuing Education, SUNY (4); Jackard (8); McDaniel (10); Mulvey (12); Williams, et. al. (14); and Yanitelli (15). A few programs which have been designed specifically to meet the needs of adult students have been reported by Caffarella (2); Division of Continuing Education, SUNY (4); Hartwig (6); Kaback (9) and Matson (11).

The purpose of the present study was to identify the counseling needs of the adult student enrolled in vocational-technical schools. Specifically the investigators sought to identify the vocational, financial, educational, personal, and social concerns reported by students.

The following research questions were addressed.

1) What counseling needs do students enrolled in post-secondary vocational-technical schools report?
2) Is age a factor in the reported counseling needs of post-secondary vocational school students?
3) Is sex a factor in the reported counseling needs of post-secondary vocational students.
4) Do full-time and part-time students report similar counseling needs?
5) Do the reported counseling needs of the full-time adult student differ from the needs expressed by the student-in-general group in post-secondary vocational schools?

METHOD

Subjects

1817 subjects participated in the study. Of these, 1514 were full- or part-time students attending one of three area vocational-technical schools in Wisconsin during 1975-76. Another 303 were persons from the same three communities who were considering returning to school but were not enrolled at the time of the study. Table 1 gives a breakdown of the sample by sex, age, and student status.

Insert Table 1 here

Instrument

A paper-and-pencil questionnaire was developed to ascertain the counseling needs of the vocational school adult student. The first part of the questionnaire was designed to elicit demographic information from the participants, including sex, age, marital status, full-time/part-time student status, number of years out of school, highest grade level achieved or degree completed, type of program, and reasons for returning to school.

Twenty-five items representing potential needs or concerns comprised the second part of the questionnaire (see Table 2). Since no one instrument was found which focused on the questions raised in this study, the final form of the questionnaire consisted of items adapted from three existing instruments--The Minnesota Counseling Inventory, Mooney

Problem Check List and The College Student Questionnaire.

The need domains tapped by the questionnaire were vocational, financial, educational (e.g., study skills, taking exams, writing papers), personal (e.g., concern with appearance), and social (e.g., supportiveness of family, fitting in with other students). Figure 1 contains the 25-item questionnaire that was given to enrolled students. The 20-item form given to prospective students was similar except that items 3, 10, 21, 22, 24 were deleted.

The questionnaire was pilot tested for clarity and readability at two institutions similar to those from which the sample was drawn. As a result of the piloting, a three-point Likert scale response format was eliminated, as was a third part of the questionnaire in which respondents were asked to report to whom they would turn for help if they were experiencing various types of problems. The response format of the final version was a checklist on which the respondent was asked to, "Please check each item below which concerns you."

Procedure

The questionnaires were distributed to student service coordinators in three Wisconsin vocational-technical schools. The particular schools were selected to insure representative sampling across size of institution, rural vs. urban setting, and area of the state. Each local coordinator was asked to distribute the questionnaires to 500 randomly

selected enrolled students and 80 randomly selected non-students. There were to be 100 subjects each (50 male and 50 female) in each of five age groups--under 21, 21-25, 26-35, 36-49, and over 50. Ten males and ten females in each of the four latter age cohorts were to comprise the non-student sample from each school.

As can be noted from Table 1, it was not always possible to attain the exact distribution of subjects called for in the original design.

Analysis of Results

For research questions 1 and 5, the frequency responses to each item was tabulated, converted to percentages, and ranked. The subgroup of older, full-time students was singled out for more specific analysis.

A Chi-square contingency analysis was used for research questions 2, 3 and 4. These 1 x N analyses were performed on each need item endorsed by at least 15% of the total student sample. An alpha level of .05 was set to reject the hypothesis of no relationships.

RESULTS

In Table 2 are presented the ranked results of the reported concerns. The results are reported in terms of the percentage of the sample checking the item.

Insert Table 2 here

Approximately one-third of the students indicated a concern for needing more information about jobs and giving oral reports in class. About one-fifth had concerns about appraising their vocational abilities, doing well on examinations, having enough money for education and having to take undesirable required courses.

Counseling Needs and Sex of Respondent

Males and females differed significantly on four of the 11 items endorsed by at least 15 percent of the sample. Males more often checked being concerned about interference from outside activities, getting studies done on time, and having to take required courses. The only item in which females expressed significantly more concern than males was having enough money to pay for their education. Table 3 presents the results by sex of respondents.

Insert Table 3 here

Counseling Needs and Age of Respondents

Table 4 presents the results of the Chi-square analyses done on all items endorsed by at least 15 percent of the student sample in relation to age. Because of the relatively small numbers of respondents in the over 26 age groups, the 26-35, 36-49, and over 50 age groups were collapsed to form one group.

Of the eleven items thus tested, nine showed a relationship to age. In each case it appears that younger students indicate more concern about everything. Respondents over 26 were less concerned about getting job information, being unemployed, interference from outside activities, getting money for school, giving oral reports, taking examinations, having to take required courses, having difficulty with mathematics, and writing papers.

Caution is urged in interpreting Table 4 insofar as a disproportionate number of part-time students are in the older age groups.

Insert Table 4 here

Counseling Needs and Full-time/Part-time Student Status

Table 5 presents the results of Chi-square analyses performed on the eleven items endorsed by at least 15 percent of the sample according to full-time/part-time status. Information on full-time/part-time status was obtained on the demographic portion of the questionnaire. Full-time students include those who were enrolled in associate of arts programs, one-year diploma programs, two-year diploma programs, and certificate programs of less than one year. Some part-time students were also enrolled in these programs. However, most part-time students were in general education classes, adult basic education classes, trade extension classes, trade proprietary classes, or enrichment courses.

Insert Table 5 here

A relationship between full-time/part-time status and amount of concern was demonstrated on ten of eleven items. Not surprisingly, full-time students reported more concern on all of them--needing more job information, unemployment, interference from outside activities, getting money for school, giving oral reports, getting studies done on time, taking examinations, taking required courses, having difficulty with mathematics, and writing papers.

The Adult Full-time Student

Of special interest in this study was the adult (over 26) full-time student. Although sex, age, and student status analyses can give some notions about the relationships between certain demographic variables and expressed concerns, the particular concerns of any subgroup defined by more than one of these variables may be obscured. Therefore, the subgroup of adult, full-time students was singled out for further analysis. Full-time adult students may be expected to demonstrate some concerns in common with other full-time students, in addition they may report others because of their age.

Table 6 presents the rankings of items endorsed by 15 percent or more of male and female full-time adult students. It appears that not

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Insert Table 6 here

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only are there differences between the adult full-time student and the student-in-general group, but differences within the full-time group between the sexes as well.

Full-time male adult students differed from vocational school, student-in-general by at least ten percentage points on five items. As a group they indicate less concern than the student-in-general group about giving oral reports, but are substantially more concerned about doing well on exams, taking undesirable required courses, having difficulty with mathematics, and finding textbooks harder to understand. Female full-time adult students report more concern than students-in-general on eight items, including doing well on exams, unemployment, taking undesirable required courses, having difficulty with mathematics, getting money for education, finding textbooks and teachers hard to understand, giving oral reports, and not believing that their ideas are shared by others. Both adult groups are less concerned than students-in-general about a lack of support from their families.

The concerns of male and female adult students rank differently in several important ways. Although both males and females report doing well on exams as their top concern, women seem to be considerably more concerned with facing unemployment and finding money for education. Unemployment appears thirteenth on the male hierarchy and sufficient

money doesn't appear at all. Furthermore, the women as a group tend to cluster their concerns among the top six, thereafter trailing off sharply. The reported male concerns tend to be more evenly distributed.

DISCUSSION

Sex, age, and full-time/part-time status all appear to be related to the type of concerns reported by students attending post-secondary vocational schools. Of these three factors, full-time/part-time status accounted for differences on ten items, age for differences on nine items, and sex for differences on four items. The results of this study also indicate that the full-time adult student differs substantially from the student-in-general group, showing differences on five items for males and nine items for females.

Although the number of items on which adult students differ is of interest, the particular items on which they differ is also most noteworthy. Both males and females report two of their greatest concerns to be "doing well on exams," and "needing more job information." After that

it appears that, for the most part, males are concerned primarily with educational matters, e.g., having to take certain required courses, having difficulty with mathematics, interference from outside activities, etc. Although the female students in this study were similarly concerned about educational matters, two other items only indirectly related to functioning academically were endorsed by a large percentage of the female sample--afraid of being unemployed after completing their program and finding enough money to pay for their education. Although it is tempting to speculate about the reasons behind this differential distribution of adult males' and females' concerns, the design of this study does not allow for any such speculation. However, that roughly forty percent of the females fear unemployment and nearly thirty percent are concerned about financing their education implies implications for the type of services that should be provided in the vocational school.

IMPLICATIONS

Academic and vocational concerns appear to be predominant among students and non-students. This finding suggests the need for trial learning experiences (possibly mini-labs) wherein the adult has an opportunity to perform the "typical" student behavior in a relatively low-risk, supportive environment. The lack of vocational information suggests the need to provide such information in a manner more geared to adults rather than adolescents.

It also appears necessary to recognize and attend to the somewhat unique needs of full-time and part-time, male and female students of varying ages.

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TABLE 1

Frequency Distribution of the Sample by
Sex, Age, and Student Status

	Under 21 N=	21-25 N=	26-35 N=	36-49 N=	Over 50 N=	Total
Males						
Full-time	95	75	86	63	5	324
Part-time	36	71	149	153	62	471
Non-student	16	27	36	34	32	145
	147	173	271	250	99	Total= 940 Male
Females						
Full-time	144	46	28	33	6	257
Part-time	63	114	115	102	68	462
Non-student	23	32	38	33	32	158
	230	192	181	168	106	Total= 877 Female
						Total sample = 1,817

TABLE 2

Percentage of Total Sample Indicating a Concern for Each Item

Item		Percentage
9.	Difficulty giving oral reports in class.	35.5
1.	Needing more information about jobs & occupations.	30.3
2.	Needing to know more about my vocational abilities.	21.8
11.	Concern about how well I do on examinations.	19.6
7.	Not having enough money to pay for my education.	18.1
12.	Being required to take courses I don't like.	18.0
5.	Outside activities interfering with getting my schoolwork done.	17.2
4.	Afraid of being unemployed after I complete my program.	16.9
6.	Family not being supportive of my being in school.	15.7
15.	Failing a course.	15.7
10.	Trouble getting my studies done on time.	15.4*
8.	Having trouble arranging for transportation to & from school.	15.4
16.	Having difficulty writing papers or getting my ideas down in writing.	14.6
17.	Finding some of my teachers too hard to understand.	12.3
3.	Not having a well-planned program.	12.3*
13.	Some difficulty with mathematics.	12.0
15.	Discouraged when I don't know what is expected of me in class.	10.4
18.	Finding some textbooks too hard to understand.	9.7
20.	Having trouble taking notes in class or outlining the material I am supposed to learn.	9.0
22.	Some classroom tests seem unfair.	9.0*
19.	Having some trouble because I am a slow reader.	8.8
24.	More trouble concentrating on my studies than most students.	8.1*
25.	Conscious that what I think is important in life is not shared by most students.	7.0
23.	Very conscious of my personal appearance (e.g., differences in clothes, etc.) compared with most students.	5.4
21.	Not having enough time to talk with my instructors.	4.9*

*Percentages based only on enrolled students.

TABLE 3

Chi-Square Analysis by Sex for Items Concerning Over 15% of the Respondents

Item	Percentage of Males	Percentage of Females	Chi-Square	P-Value
Job information	30	31	.13	N.S.
Knowing vocational abilities	19	23	3.3	N.S.
Unemployment	15	18	1.5	N.S.
Interference of outside activities	21	15	9.0	$< .01$
Money for school	14	20	7.9	$< .01$
Oral reports	16	17	.4	N.S.
Studies done on time	20	9	40.4	$< .01$
Taking examinations	37	40	1.1	N.S.
Taking required courses	24	19	4.5	$< .05$
Mathematics difficulties	21	19	.7	N.S.
Writing	17	16	.6	N.S.

TABLE 4

Chi-Square Analysis by Age for Items Concerning Over 15% of the Respondents

Item	Percentage of Under 21	Percentage of 21-25	Percentage of Over 25	Chi-Square	P-Value
Job information	44	38	22	66.9	$<.01$
Knowing vocational abilities	23	22	19	2.5	N.S.
Unemployment	33	22	8	119.4	$<.01$
Interference of outside activities	25	21	15	20.6	$<.01$
Money for school	23	24	12	34.7	$<.01$
Oral reports	26	16	13	31.6	$<.01$
Studies done on time	17	17	13	3.8	N.S.
Taking examinations	57	35	33	56.2	$<.01$
Taking required courses	41	20	14	108.5	$<.01$
Mathematics difficulties	24	20	18	6.6	$<.05$
Writing	23	17	14	13.0	$<.01$

TABLE 5

Chi-Square Analysis According to Full-Time and Part-Time Student Status for Items Concerning Over 15% of the Respondents

Item	Percentage of Full-Time Respondents	Percentage of Part-Time Respondents	Chi-Square	P-Value
Job information	43	23	64.7	<.01
Knowing vocational abilities	21	20	.2	N.S.
Unemployment	32	7	151.8	<.01
Interference of outside activities	23	15	14.4	<.01
Money for school	24	12	40	<.01
Oral reports	24	12	39	<.01
Studies done on time	18	13	6	<.05
Taking examinations	54	28	101.7	<.01
Taking required courses	40	9	203.4	<.01
Mathematics difficulties	27	15	31.8	<.01
Writing	22	13	22.8	<.01

CE 010 204

TABLE 6

Ranking of Concerns
Male and Female Full-Time Students Over Age 26

Males		Females	
Item	Percentage	Item	Percentage
Doing well on exams	49***	Doing well on exams	54***
Required courses	32*	Unemployment	39**
Needing job information	31	Needing job information	32
Difficulty with math	25*	Required courses	32*
Interference with outside activities	24	Difficulty with math	30*
Giving oral reports	23*	Money for education	28*
Getting studies done on time	23	Textbooks hard to understand	22*
Writing papers	21	Appraisal of vocational abilities	21
Textbooks hard to understand	20*	Giving oral reports	21*
Appraising vocational abilities	19	What I think is not shared	18*
Not knowing what is expected	16		
Not having a well-planned program	15		
Unemployment	15		
Classroom tests unfair	15		

*** 30 or more percentage point difference when compared with student-in-general group

** 20-30 percentage point difference when compared to student-in-general group

* 10-15 percentage point difference when compared to student-in-general group